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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: SCENESETTER FOR USAID ADMINISTRATOR
FORE'S VISIT TO SKOPJE, JUNE 8-10

LEVERAGING STRONG PRO-U.S. SENTIMENT

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador Milovanovic and the Embassy Skopje interagency team welcome you to Macedonia. Your visit comes at a time when U.S. influence in Macedonia is higher than at any time in recent memory. President Bush's solid support for Macedonia's NATO candidacy at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, coupled with subsequent U.S. actions to show our support for a fair and speedy resolution of the name dispute with Greece, have reaffirmed to the government, opposition and public that the U.S. remains Macedonia's single most important strategic partner. We are capitalizing on this heightened confidence and trust to press for progress on several important U.S. policy objectives in Macedonia and the region, including:

--ensuring the government takes effective action to repair the damage to Macedonia's democratic credentials following recent elections that were marred by violence, intimidation, and electoral fraud;

--moving quickly to resolve the name dispute with Greece; and

--strengthening relations with Kosovo through official recognition and prompt border demarcation.

REPAIRING THE DAMAGE FROM FLAWED ELECTIONS

¶2. (SBU) Early parliamentary elections held June 1 -- which the main governing party won by a landslide -- were marred by violence, intimidation, ballot stuffing (in some cases with police complicity), and proxy voting. International community missions monitoring the elections, as well as the OSCE's ODIHR mission, agreed that the conduct of the elections fell far short of international standards, and that not all eligible citizens in the country had a chance to freely exercise their right to vote. The flawed elections damaged the country's democratic credentials and set back its NATO and EU integration efforts.

¶3. (SBU) We have delivered a clear message to the government that there must be extensive re-runs (June 15) in those polling stations where problems were noted in order to begin repairing the damage. We have insisted that all citizens taking part in the re-runs must be able to do so freely, fairly, and in a safe and secure environment. We also have told the government that it must take immediate and effective steps to prosecute and punish those responsible for the violence and electoral irregularities.

RESOLVE THE NAME DISPUTE, FOCUS ON NATO MEMBERSHIP

¶4. (SBU) Although stung by the Greek veto at Bucharest, both President Crvenkovski and PM Gruevski remain committed to a negotiated settlement of the name issue that preserves Macedonian redlines. Those redlines include no change in the description of the Macedonian nationality or language, no change in the constitutional name, and -- for Gruevski -- public approval of any settlement through a referendum. We have heard reports from the government that the UN special envoy on the name issue -- Ambassador Nimetz -- may visit Skopje sometime in mid-June, which could re-start talks with Athens on finding a mutually acceptable solution.

¶5. (SBU) We have encouraged Macedonia to engage in the name talks with maximum flexibility in order to resolve the dispute in time to join Albania and Croatia in signing NATO accession protocols on July 9. A tall order even under normal circumstances, that challenge is complicated by post-election political dynamics and the fact that a new government cannot be formed until well after the June 15 re-runs.

KOSOVO: DELINKING DEMARCATION AND RECOGNITION

¶6. (SBU) Skopje and Pristina formed in April a Joint Technical Commission (JTC) to demarcate their shared border on the basis of a 2001 agreement between Skopje and Belgrade (which Pristina grudgingly accepted, with USG prodding, per the Ahtisaari Plan). The JTC has met several times since then. Actual demarcation, a top priority for the GOM, could begin soon, despite strong Serb government objections to proceeding absent Belgrade's participation.

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¶7. (SBU) The GOM is wary, however, that the Kosovars may refuse to demarcate some potentially contentious areas delineated in the 2001 agreement. Skopje, which is trying to maintain balanced relations with both Belgrade and Pristina, has suggested recognition of Kosovo could be facilitated by beginning the demarcation process. We have urged the GOM to continue the positive momentum on border demarcation, while avoiding linkage between demarcation and a decision on recognition.

USG ASSISTANCE PRIORITIES

¶8. (SBU) USG assistance priorities here target reforms needed to ensure Macedonia's NATO and EU accession. Specific challenges include combating corruption, addressing high unemployment, and implementing the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement, which provides for better minority rights protection. The top USG assistance objective in Macedonia is "governing justly and democratically," which includes the inter-related goals of rule of law promotion and governing justly through good governance. "Economic growth," with activities aimed at improving private sector competitiveness, agricultural productivity and workforce training, is the second highest USG development priority here.

INTENSIFIED PARTNERSHIP

¶9. (SBU) The U.S. and Macedonia signed a "Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation" on May 7 during FM Milososki's visit to Washington. The declaration highlights the strong U.S.-Macedonian partnership in promoting international stability and calls for broader bilateral cooperation in the areas of security, people-to-people ties, and commerce. We currently are negotiating an "Open Skies" agreement to liberalize air travel between the U.S. and Macedonia in the framework of that declaration.
Milovanovic